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FUTURE PROBATION.

IF one could ever copy the extraordinary feat of so distinguished a scholar as President Bartlett of Dartmouth, and "Speak as one of the silent multitude," it would be when one sees the church he loves torn by conflict of doctrine;—this side eager, forced into new positions by the irresistible expansiveness of truth; the other side anxious, defensive, guarding the old positions with all the solicitude of love and all the weight of experience, fearing that what is called new truth is but old error in new disguise.

It is easy to minimize the conflict, by declaring it impractical, abstract, insignificant. It is easy to ridicule it by calling it a "burning" question, by suggesting that the old theologians are afraid that too many sinners will escape them and reach Heaven despite their theology. But all this serves nothing. No one really doubts that one faction is just as humane as the other. What is feared is not that the heathen will escape doom; but that the teaching of a false security will lull both Christian and Pagan heathen into losing their only chance of escaping doom. No wit, no levity can hinder this from being a weighty question. With Dr. Smyth in Massachusetts and Dr. Woodrow in Georgia fighting for their lives, their fortune, and their sacred honor in this battle-field, it cannot be called a narrow, an impractical, or an obsolete question. There is no issue of politics or of social life which is not affected by the solution of this problem. The wrath and warfare of Ireland can be better read in its light. The upward struggle of Bulgaria and the downward pressure of Russia are a part of its eternal procession. The fierce grapple of Labor with Capital constitutes one mark of its progress. The heart-throbs of American independents in their life-and-death race after a versatile and agile Administration become amenable to classification when viewed as incidents of a world-embracing system. Minister Phelps's stern disapprobation of this

REVIEW can be more easily borne under its mitigating possibilities. To dismiss such a theory with the assurance that its young believers hold their views only as theory, and not as doctrine, is altogether unsatisfactory. They may not preach the theory, but it must color all their preaching. The assurance is appropriate as an indication of the general condition of things, but not as an argument for toleration.

A full, fair, and frank presentation of truth is not only safe, on general principles, but in this especial case it must remove much of the apprehension, deeply and widely felt, that acceptance of what is called the new departure would effectually destroy the foreign missionary work of the churches, and be, indeed, antagonistic to all preaching. On the contrary, a removal of ancient inconsistencies, contradictions, and impossibilities, and the substitution of new harmonies, must give strong impetus, fresh courage, and a reasonable hope in allying ourselves with the Power that makes for righteousness, whether to secure Republicanism for America, freedom for Ireland, Christianity for the heathen, or the elevation of the whole human race.

This is not to discard, or even to discount, the old theology. It is not to assert that the new theology is ultimate. It is only to recognize that the Eternal Energy, the Holy Spirit, always working on the earth, has brought us to one of the many milestones that measure the advance of history. It is an advance to which the honored of the old school have contributed as important a part as the younger generation of the new school. It is the learning, the devotion, the persistence of the old which have made the new possible. It is their unceasing prayer, *Thy Kingdom come!* which has wrought this palpable new development of that kingdom. Nor is it the first time that the Kingdom of God has come without giving the expected countersign, and has, therefore, been temporarily mistaken for the kingdom of evil. Notwithstanding, said Christ, be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

Successive changes in any theology founded on the Bible are not only liable but imperative. If the Bible is a merely human book like any other volume of history, or poetry, or philosophy, then we should expect any system founded on it to be fixed. When we have thoroughly read a volume of Homer or Ranke, or Descartes, we feel that we have mastered its contents accord-

ing to our several abilities. However wide its scope, still its scope is limited. We make no new discoveries in Macaulay. We found no new systems on Aristotle. These men do their work, shape the thought of their generation, and pass to the shelves of immortality—to be known by name to the intelligent, to be studied here and there by scholars, to be absolutely dead to the populace.

Thus also our best and latest books of religion—by Professor Allen, Matthew Arnold, Dean Stanley, Herbert Spencer, and others—full as they are of high thought and honorable words, enlightenment and sanctification—differ from the Bible in that they are not infinite. It is all there; nothing is behind. And it is a little all—the arc of a small circle. But the Bible is forever unfolding. It is a guide to the humble heart which knows nothing about it intellectually, but craves God. The wisest genius, climbing the mountain-tops of mind finds equally that the Bible is before him, spanning still his highest heaven with its bow of promise, arched by his strictest law of mathematics, tinted according to his most rigid chromatic science, satisfying in form and color his most delicate artistic sense.

Other the best books are to the Bible what a picture of the midnight sky by some master's hand is to the dome of heaven itself. The one is stirring, stimulating, suggestive, ideal; but it is a flat surface—always the same. Too near, it is a daub of oil on canvas. But the over-bending heaven is ever-revealing. It lights the peasant on his path, guides the mariner across the sea, who know not one star from another, except as private light and guide, nor guess whence any star is circling or on what law it is hung. But the astronomer, too, who turns his cunning glass upon it, sees what they see, and more—marvels upon marvels, universe beyond universe, yet never gets so far as to reach a bound; with keenest eye and strongest lens never plucks its secret from the sky; with life-long study and devotion never takes a single step in learning that does not widen the horizon of his ignorance.

From such a book, the repository of the inspiration of ages, so heavily charged with the divine Spirit that we call it *The Book of Inspiration*, it is but natural to expect that truth upon truth will unfold. Its revelation should keep step with the march of the human mind. To found upon it an unchanging theology would be to relegate it to the list of books, great indeed, but plentiful enough to make a list, accepted at one age of the

world, practically unused thereafter. A theology unchangeably true to its unchanging principles of righteousness, love to God and love to man, but forever developing new features in conformity with new discoveries of its meaning after new study of its history and new unfolding of the secrets of the world—this is precisely what we should expect from that intensity of Revelation which makes this the Book of books.

Since, therefore, change need not be feared, let us ask now : Is a future probation, or a present probation, or a second probation, or a probation in Adam, or any kind of probation, a feature of the Divine government of the world, or is it merely a human device ? If it is the latter, it may be altogether swept away from religion, if not from theology.

Probation is defined to be any proceeding designed to *ascertain* truth, to *determine* character. But an Omniscient Being needs no *proceeding* to enable Him to *ascertain* the truth about His creatures, to *determine* their character. He knows it every moment. A probation to enable him to ascertain and determine must, therefore, be only human endeavor to put the ways of the Creator into some sort of relation to human ways. *We* cannot ascertain truth except by long investigation. *We* cannot determine character except by a close and intricate balance-sheet. Therefore, we cumber the Creator with our clumsy invention and wage deadly war for that cumber.

Can anything be more absurd ? A dear friend of mine, a preacher of the gospel after the straitest sect of orthodoxy, is wont to say that although we are made in the image of God, we are a great deal more unlike Him than we are like Him. Strong in the consciousness of bearing His image, we reject this statement promptly ; but a second and reasonable thought compels us to accept it, for the quantitative difference between God and man is so great as to constitute a qualitative difference. An atom of salt spray on the rose's petal is in the image and likeness of the ocean. Its components and proportions are the same. It is governed by the same laws, is derived from the same source, is tending to the same goal ; and the quantitative difference between itself and the ocean, though immense, and to us incalculable, is not infinite. Yet who, from the evanescent and almost impalpable atom of spray, could form the slightest conception of the mighty deep, its boundless peace and eternal unrest, its marvel of color and sound

and storm, its upbearing power, its purifying potency, its destructive energy, its ministration to human weal? Surely the spray-atom, though of the ocean, is more unlike than like the ocean. It is like only by its own tiny measurement. It is unlike by the countless billows of wide-stretching solitudes.

I am never borne through the human wilderness from the Grand Central Station in New York to the Heights of Brooklyn without a heart-sickening fear that after all there cannot be a God. The thousands of lights in the early evening lend a twilight to the city, and every light means many homes and every home many souls. Miles on miles of stirring, eager hopes and fears and purposes—can there be a God supervising all? Is it possible there can be a Being who has an interest in every one of these minds and hearts? Overhead the lights of heaven repeat and extend the problem. As many stars, so many suns; as many suns, so many systems of worlds; and beyond all visible suns and systems, universe on universe circling the unthinkable spaces, till our great stirring, twinkling, twilight world is but a pin-point in the immeasurable sky—how can there be a Being equal to launching, guiding, upholding this visible universe, which is as far beyond thought as it is beyond expression?

There is only one thing to hold the mind steady; the universe is a fact. The miracle is wrought. The Christian and the Atheist are at one on the main point—that the immensity exists, and that it is an immensity of order, of law, of harmony. Therefore, it is of one. The anemone whorls its tender petals of earliest spring in obedience to the law which guides Arcturus with his Sons. For all our littleness we are just as sure of this as if ourselves had made Arcturus. The Christian and the Atheist alike find themselves in a universe of law which they did not establish, and which they cannot overthrow. It would, indeed, be impossible to believe that one Being could create and control from large to small, were it not that we see the creation and feel the control—both in infinite measure, great and small in both directions alike beyond our ken. What matter whether we call this creative force Absolute Being, or the Stream of Tendency, or the World-Soul, or Unconscious Intelligence, or the Unknowable, or Eternal Energy, or the Power outside ourselves that makes for righteousness—Jehovah, Jove, or Lord? All nomenclature is but the outreach of language towards the Unreachable. All theology is but

search for the Unsearchable. What possible analogy can give to a being chained every moment to one single spot of earth any adequate idea of a Being who is at all times everywhere present? Thought offers the only glimmer to the imagination, and that is, indeed, only a glimmer. What analogy between thought which can fix firmly on only one object at a time, and but feebly on two or three at most, and that Infinite Thought to which all is an Eternal Now and Here? Science is more frank than theology, and confesses an ignorance, an inability, which theology cannot disown or disarm by calling it infidelity.

Nothing is gained for religion by attempting to include the greatness of God in the littleness of man. Here theology stumbles, but never demonstrates.

“What mortals think they know of God
A thousand tomes rehearse;
What mortals do not know of God
Fills all the universe.”

“I believe,” says the Reverend Mr. Foster, “that God is a personality, not a mere blind force;” but Spencer, and Huxley, and Darwin proclaim no blind force, but a force unfailingly discerning—a force that never falters, makes no mistakes, suffers no repulse, advances forever and forever with unerring precision, in unending and orderly evolution. “Nor an unknown power,” continues Mr. Foster, “but a person like ourselves; a person with intellect, and heart, and will; a person whose glorious being *we may faintly comprehend* by looking into our own hearts.” And in the very next article of his creed he declares: “God exists in three distinctions *impossible to be comprehended*. . . . This mysterious existence is *beyond my comprehension*, and I rejoice that it is.”

Yes, but why then say that it is not? Why in one sentence declare that God is a person like ourselves, and in the next that He is unlike ourselves? Why with one breath affirm that God can be comprehended, and with a second that He is impossible of comprehension? It is better to be rejected by a thousand councils, and to dwell with the unorthodox forever, than to darken conviction by words. The thrusts of faction may be parried by skillful and adroit phraseology, but the understanding of the simple is confused.

Theology needs a new baptism from science into the greatness

of God. When theology pronounces God to be a person like ourselves, it needs to be iterated and reiterated that God is not a person like ourselves. Theology and science agree that man is made in the image and likeness of God ; not that God is made in the image and likeness of man. Man is made in the likeness of God only approximately, as the molecule of salt spray is in the likeness of the ocean. True science admits the fact reverently, and sacrifices language rather than sacrifice the Infinite. Pseudo-science half learns a half truth and proclaims its feat scornfully, God ; but with pseudo-science we have nothing to do. Theology is too apt to belittle the Infinite by thinking Him such an one as ourselves. And it is a theology which thinks God such an one as ourselves that has invented the whole scheme of probation, past, present, and future, and makes fight upon it as a revelation of God let down from the skies.

All theories of probation assume that God is a stronger man, and only that. He created man upon the Earth and gave him a special order, whose violation was death. Man disobeyed, but the penalty was not enforced. Man was reprieved. His punishment was mitigated ;—mitigated, however, to the disaster of millions of his descendants, who would never have been born at all if his punishment had been enforced according to the Divine warning, but who were born to eternal anguish after a few brief years of guilty, flitting, and intermittent pleasure. The best that can be said of all Adam's descendants, born under God's violation of His own word, is that they are put under test, under probation. If they stand the test they will be saved. If they fail under the test they will be lost. It is perfectly plain sailing.

But Adam, created innocent under the smile of God, failed. What ground to hope that his children, born in sin, and under God's frown, can succeed ?

This is undoubtedly the way it would be if man had the ordering of things as they stand—even a very strong man whom we should call God. How otherwise could he tell whether the world were improving or deteriorating ; whether man were fit or unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven ? The highest justice which the human heart conceives is to wait till the account is all in and then balance the debt and credit. This highest justice he attributes to the Highest Being and launches poor humanity upon its fore-doomed trial trip.

Is not the time ripe to repudiate the whole theory? It may not have been entirely irrational in its inception. It may have been the best possible effort of the human mind. But we ought to pay our debt to the past by bringing in a better hope for the future. Give to the dead past this dead scheme, this lifeless, limited, mechanical "plan of salvation," which is rather a plan of damnation, and let us, in the new light which has broken forth from God's holy word and from His unfolding world, see no longer through a glass darkly, that when the Angel of the Lord proclaimed good tidings of great joy to all people, he meant what he said. It is not good tidings of great joy to all people if only one little, warm, narrow Gulf Stream of life is coursing through the wide, cold, bitter ocean of death. It is not good tidings of great joy to all people if Rev. J. D. Davis speaks truth in declaring that "there are eight hundred million souls within our reach who have never heard the gospel, the great mass of whom, on any possible theory, will forever perish, unless we give them, at once, the bread of life." It would be most wicked in God to let the happiness of eight hundred millions of people depend forever on so frail a reed as the fitful, uncertain, and certainly feeble action of a few thousand people on the other side of their world who never saw them, who know next to nothing about them, and who have much ado to keep their own heads above water. It is not good tidings of great joy if all hangs on the doubtful rhetoric that the Church be "waked up and shaken out over the outer rim, as it were, of that fearful abyss of woe which yawns just before these heathen millions, as well as before so many millions here at home." If this is what Christ came for, the angel should have announced bad tidings of great woe which should be to most people. Heaven be praised that our Angels of Annunciation were of Heaven and not of Earth!

All notion of future probation, or second probation, or first probation, of another chance, or a chance after death, or any chance at all, is utterly unworthy of such a conception of God as the holy men of old and the holy men of to-day have enabled us to form. It is miserably unworthy of such a conception of life, of religion, of Christianity as Christ, and even as the Apostles, preached. It is pitifully weak for such a conception of the nature, the degradation, the disintegration of sin as intelligent observation of the world in the revealing light of Christianity ought to give us. If

the possibility of repentance or salvation after death would cut the nerve of Christian missions, then that nerve ought to be cut and the Christian missionaries ought themselves to be converted, for they are carrying to the heathen a false gospel and have themselves no adequate conception and no healthy horror of sin. When Dr. Hamlin makes his Oriental Apostate say, in view of "a second chance," that "it is foolish to be all our lives subject to the fear of death when we can all have a good time both here and there," he shows himself to be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. He shows that he is at variance not only with the gospel of Christ, but with the best conscience of the world. He shows that he thinks that to sin is to have a good time, instead of a bad time ; that Christ came to save from penalty, and not from sin ; that the Kingdom of Heaven is something in the future, and not in the present ; that death is the beginning of the end, instead of the end of the beginning ; that Christ was an afterthought, and not a forethought ; that God in Christ would reconcile Himself to the world, and not the world unto Himself. No man—minister or missionary—has really "experienced religion" unless he sees that sin is so hideous, so revolting, so destructive as to constitute of itself—Hell. For comfort and for warning is given us the hope and the fear of life after death ; but even in this life alone we see, we feel the eternal punishment of selfishness and malice. All the wretchedness of this wretched world comes from violation of law, and chiefly from violation of known law. All the happiness of the world comes from being in harmony with the Eternal Righteousness. We might just as well refuse to feed the hungry and heal the sick, because there is "a chance after death," as cease to stamp out or transmute out murder and meanness, because there is a chance after death. The very proof and substance of Christ's divine mission was—not to induce people to refrain from having a good time now, in order that they might have a longer good time hereafter, but to make them begin now, instantly, to have a good time, by ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

It is probable that in the world as it is we see the world as it has been, even in the geologic ages. We are sure, at least, of the world as it is. The present moment is a cross-section of eternity. We find man now very little higher than the beasts. It is not necessary to discuss evolution, to decide whether man is a devel-

oped animal or an undeveloped angel. We know that there are now on the earth tribes of men who are savages, uncouth, horrible, in mode of life more unlike the highest man than they are unlike the highest beasts. Yet we know, too, that in them is something which differentiates them even from the highest beasts—a cultivable spiritual quality which in the beast is utterly wanting. Through every grade we mount upward to the highest peaks of humanity—men and women of pure heart, clear head, unselfish life. Why is it not the simplest, the most reasonable, the natural belief that this great human host was put on the earth for education, not for probation; that the world was made for man; that all the ages of preparation, through which the earth was shaping itself from a void and formless, a seething and roaring mass into a stable and habitable home, it was shaping itself under Fatherly guidance for the dwelling-place of that most finely organized animal which was to receive the breath of Divine Life and become of all created beings upon this earth the only Spiritual Being—sons of God? It would be quite in the nature of all other things that man should begin low down, just above the beasts, and end high up, just below the angels. Wholly why, we do not know. We cannot comprehend the Eternal Creator. But we easily do know that creation must be the one or the other—*instantaneous* or *not instantaneous*. If it were *instantaneous*, everything must begin in the middle. The record of the rocks, the record of Genesis, and the record of our own eyes unite to testify that everything begins at a beginning. We are in a system of gradual and orderly unfolding. The tree ripens from seed. The man grows up from the child. History is born of history. We cannot trace the original beginnings, but resultant beginnings are the regular order. The Bible equally narrates a gradual succession, a systematic advance. This is as near a fixed fact as we shall ever find to stand on.

That Creative Power which in the material world science calls force, and which in the unseen world theology calls Spiritual force—God—has brooded as steadfastly, as minutely, over the feeble, fluctuating human spirit as the Earth-force brooded over the first stir of material protoplasm. Slowly and with infinite suffering this beastly man has been wrought into scholar and saint. In his beastliest condition he is nearly exterminated. Only a few lingering specimens here and there testify to his low estate.

His most sordid traits have been educated out of him by the Divine Teacher. The trees, the rocks, storm, and sky, and stars have been his lessons. Prophet, priest, and king interpreted him to himself with ever increasing rapidity. In the fullness of time, Christ came, the perfect Teacher, the perfect Exemplar, God manifest in the flesh, holding within himself all purity, all love, all sacrifice, revealing to man once for all his true spiritual kinship. God is too great for man to grasp. Out of the illimitable past, from the inconceivable future, we cannot summon Him, but of his own will and invention, in Christ,—lo! I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

What room is there for probation here? The wretchedest cannibal that ever breathed was as truly a child of God as the greatest philosopher. He had received the boon of spiritual life. He was a part of the plan of creation. He must be involved in the plan of redemption. How? I do not know; but a righteous God could never leave him out. What we do see and know, as a matter of evidence, is that the trend of humanity is upward, and it is impossible to believe that eternal force will ever bend and fix it downward. The low, beastly nature of every man is always drawing him down. The aspiring divine soul of him is always forcing him up. It is a long fight, a hard fight; sometimes it seems to be a losing fight; but, on the whole, judging over long reaches, it is always a winning fight. The historic world has never relapsed so far into barbarism as it has come out from barbarism. Nations rise and fall; but the great lines of civilization and of spiritual religion make a steady advance. Never over so wide an area did heavenly love diffuse itself through human hearts and spring up in justice and mercy as we see to-day. If man was created a perfected spiritual being, and launched on the world for a probation, his condition is hopeless. If he lost the battle when he had every advantage, it is useless to expect him to win under every disadvantage. But if he was created the highest animal, and with a rudimentary spirit, then we can fight it out with the greatest good cheer, for God is working in us. All the vice and the crime, the wickedness and the weakness that disfigure our own lives and disgust us in public rehearsal, are the mark of the beast, but fading slowly into the tracery of a new name. All the warfare of the world is a warfare between the flesh and the spirit; between the soul of the beast that goeth downward and the soul of the man

that goeth upward ; between the departing animal and the advancing angel. The serpent bruises the heel of humanity, and its sting is sharp. But it is not fatal. Humanity is bruising the serpent's head, and when the head is crushed the serpent is dead. The sting of death is sin, and with sin exterminated, behold already new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

GAIL HAMILTON.